

Message Text

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SUBJECT: NATO ASSESSMENT SERIES CONTRIBUTION
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NATO CONFIDENTIAL FROM WASHINGTON
NADA/ASSESSMENT/MAY 003/MFA WASHINGTON/
SUBJECT: GUYANA AND SURINAM: BORDER CONFLICT AND
DOMESTIC PROBLEMS

THE CONFLICT ALONG THE GUYANA/SURINAM BORDER, WHICH
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HAS ITS GENESIS IN THE LONGSTANDING DISPUTE BETWEEN
THE TWO COUNTRIES OVER A 6000 SQUARE MILE AREA BETWEEN THE
NEW AND CORENTYNE RIVERS HAS FLARED ONCE AGAIN.
SURINAMESE AUTHORITIES HAVE ARRESTED A NUMBER OF

UNDOCUMENTED GUYANESE WORKERS AND HARASSED GUYANESE
FISHERMEN ALONG THE UPPER CORENTYNE RIVER WHICH FORMS

THE NORTHWESTERN BORDER BETWEEN THE TWO NATIONS AND WHERE GUYANESE HAD BEEN GIVEN LICENSE TO FISH UNTIL LATE 1977. THE SURINAMESE ACTIONS APPEAR TO BE IN RETALIATION FOR LAST FALL'S SEIZURE OF A NUMBER OF SURINAM-BASED TRAWLERS CAUGHT FISHING IN GUYANA'S NEWLY DECLARED 200-MILE ECONOMIC ZONE.

THE GUYANESE DELIVERED A STRONG PROTEST OVER THE LATEST INCIDENTS AND INFORMED THE SURINAMESE THAT FURTHER DISCUSSION OF OUTSTANDING ISSUES BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES MUST BE HELD IN GEORGETOWN. THE SURINAMESE, WHILE TAKING A CONCILIATORY TONE, HAVE REPLIED THAT TALKS SHOULD BE RESUMED IN PARAMARIBO.

GUYANA'S VERY TOUGH LINE MAY BE A PLOY BY THE COUNTRY'S EMBATTLED PRIME MINISTER, FORBES BURNHAM, TO DISTRACT ATTENTION FROM GUYANA'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND HIS POLITICAL MACHINATIONS TO AVOID ELECTIONS. INDEED, BURNHAM MAY BE USING THE BORDER DISPUTE TO JUSTIFY A DECLARATION OF NATIONAL EMERGENCY WHICH WOULD PERMIT POSTPONEMENT OF THE ELECTIONS WITHOUT RECOURSE TO CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES.

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